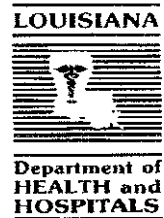




Kathleen Babineaux Blanco  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF LOUISIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS



Frederick P. Cerise, M.D., M.P.H.  
SECRETARY

October 11, 2006

**TO HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS AND INFECTION CONTROL PRACTITIONERS**

Last year, hurricanes Katrina and Rita severely stressed the hospital system in the State. With flu season upon us, it is more important than ever that we comply with a proven effective method to prevent the spread of flu throughout the community - immunization of our health care workforce.

With this sense of urgency in mind, the Department of Health and Hospitals is again conducting our Hospital Employee Influenza Educational Campaign for all employees of Louisiana health care institutions and nursing homes. As a major health care provider in your community, you have an opportunity to play a leading role in preventing the spread of influenza. It is our responsibility as health care providers to do all that we can to prevent an influenza outbreak, especially during this critical time when our health systems are still stretched to the limit. The importance of your participation in this campaign is paramount.

Influenza is a serious infection that causes an average of 36,000 deaths and 114,000 hospitalizations in the United States each year. Health care workers are at especially high risk for acquiring and transmitting influenza infection due to their exposure to ill patients, as well as their exposure in the community. Research suggests that health care workers can be a key source in institutional outbreaks contributing to increased morbidity and mortality among vulnerable patients.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the immunization of health care workers may reduce the risks of outbreaks in all types of health care facilities, and has specifically been shown to significantly reduce morbidity (43% in Influenza-like illness) and mortality (44% reduction) among geriatric patients in long-term care facilities. [CDC. Prevention and Control of Influenza: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice. MMWR. 2003;52(RR-8): 1-34.]

Despite long-standing recommendations issued by the CDC, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, and other national health care organizations, only 36 percent of workers who have direct contact with patients are immunized annually.

Influenza immunization provides personal protection for health care workers and minimizes workforce absenteeism during the influenza season. Research shows that for each employee vaccinated, a health care institution saves between \$47 and \$117 per year per employee.

What can you do as an administrator or infection control practitioner at a hospital or nursing home? Through your commitment to encourage vaccination of your direct patient care staff, your facility may reduce morbidity and mortality among vulnerable patients. By making this vaccination campaign a priority over the next two months, your employees and the community members that you serve will benefit. We hope to see you and all other facilities in your area achieve a very high immunization rate for your direct patient care staff.

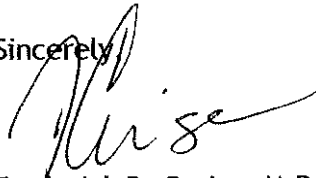
To help achieve the goal of high employee vaccination rates, we will provide your infection control practitioner with:

- 1) Educational materials emphasizing annual employee influenza programs as the first line of defense;
- 2) Information for all health care workers stressing the importance of participating in the Employee Influenza Vaccination Program; and
- 3) Technical support to your staff from the Office of Public Health's designated Regional Influenza Education Coordinator, working in collaboration with the designated Regional Hospital Coordinator.

You can make a difference in preventing the spread of influenza in your community. We hope that you will use the attached information to assist you in implementing an Influenza Employee Vaccination Campaign in your facility. We have also attached recommendations for implementing an employee vaccination campaign. The materials will also be available from the Louisiana Hospital Association, and from your regional Designated Regional Coordinator and the Regional Influenza Education Coordinators.

Thank you for your participation in this essential program.

Sincerely,



Frederick P. Cerise, M.D., M.P.H.  
Secretary

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Attachment